

How to Prepare and Run a Table Top Exercise for your Neighborhood Command Team

A Table Top Exercise (TTE) is a great way to provide practical experience for your neighborhood Command Team without the complication and stress of actually managing teams in the field. A couple definitions:

What is a **Command Team**? It is the mission of the Command Team to support the Neighborhood Incident Commander as that person manages neighborhood disaster response. This group can expand or contract as needed, but usually it consists of:

- a Neighborhood Incident Commander
- a Deputy Incident Commander,
- a Communication Team Leader, and
- a Scribe.

What is a **Table Top Exercise**? A Table Top Exercise (TTE) is an informal training tool managed by a facilitator. There is no hands-on practice or field work involved. These exercises can be used for many types of training, but are ideally suited to provide practice for Command Team members as they manage information and for the Commander as that person makes decisions. They also generate discussion of various issues regarding a hypothetical, simulated emergency. The process of drafting the TTE scenario is itself an excellent planning tool because the person writing the exercise scenario must carefully consider what problems the neighborhood (and the Command Team) might face.

To conduct a TTE for your Command Team, you should have the following materials on hand:

- **A Neighborhood map.**
 - A generic map of the CORE neighborhood follows which is based on the one used during CORE hands-on training.
- **A Neighborhood Status Board.**
 - A status board follows which is based on the CORE neighborhood map.
 - You may, of course, use the map and Status Board that you would use during a field exercise or an actual event, but you will have to adapt the following sequence of events to do so..
- **Command Team members mission statement**
 - This is a standardized statement of the missions of the several team members. Having this document on hand will make their rolls clear to each participant.
- **An Exercise Scenario**
 - The Exercise Scenario describes the situation as the exercise begins. You may conduct the exercise with whatever disaster event (or combination of events) you wish to simulate. Your background scenario can be tailored to the specific needs of your neighborhood. If your group is just getting started with disaster response, the scenario you plan can be straightforward. As you gain experience, it can become more complex. At a minimum, the scenario should include:
 - The time of day.
 - The weather
 - The type of disaster the neighborhood faces.
 - The number of persons available to the Commander and their training level.
 - Whether or not the Command Center and the Disaster First Aid Station have been set up.
- **A Sequence of Events**
 - Most sequences of events are designed to run for an hour. Begin writing your sequence of events with a series of time marks in a column on the left side of a page. Start with time mark 0:00 and create a series indicating minutes after the beginning of the exercise; 0:03, 0:07, etc. ending with 1:00 for the completion of an hour of TTE time. Make the time marks several minute apart and vary the interval between them.

- Next, create an event for each time mark. You should begin with an exercise that includes 12 to 15 events. They should range in complexity from simple things like toppled chimneys to complex things like fires and trapped persons. Again, the experience of your group will determine how many and how challenging the events should be.
 - Inputs should come from a variety of sources:
 - From Field Teams by radio or runner.
 - AM radio.
 - Spontaneous volunteers walking up to the Command Center.
 - Information from the umpire regarding changes in the number and training level of persons available to form field teams.
 - You do not want to create an unmanageable sequence of events, but at least some of these events should be complex and some should be incomplete or confusing – as they will be when you do this in the real world.
- **A clock to time the exercise**

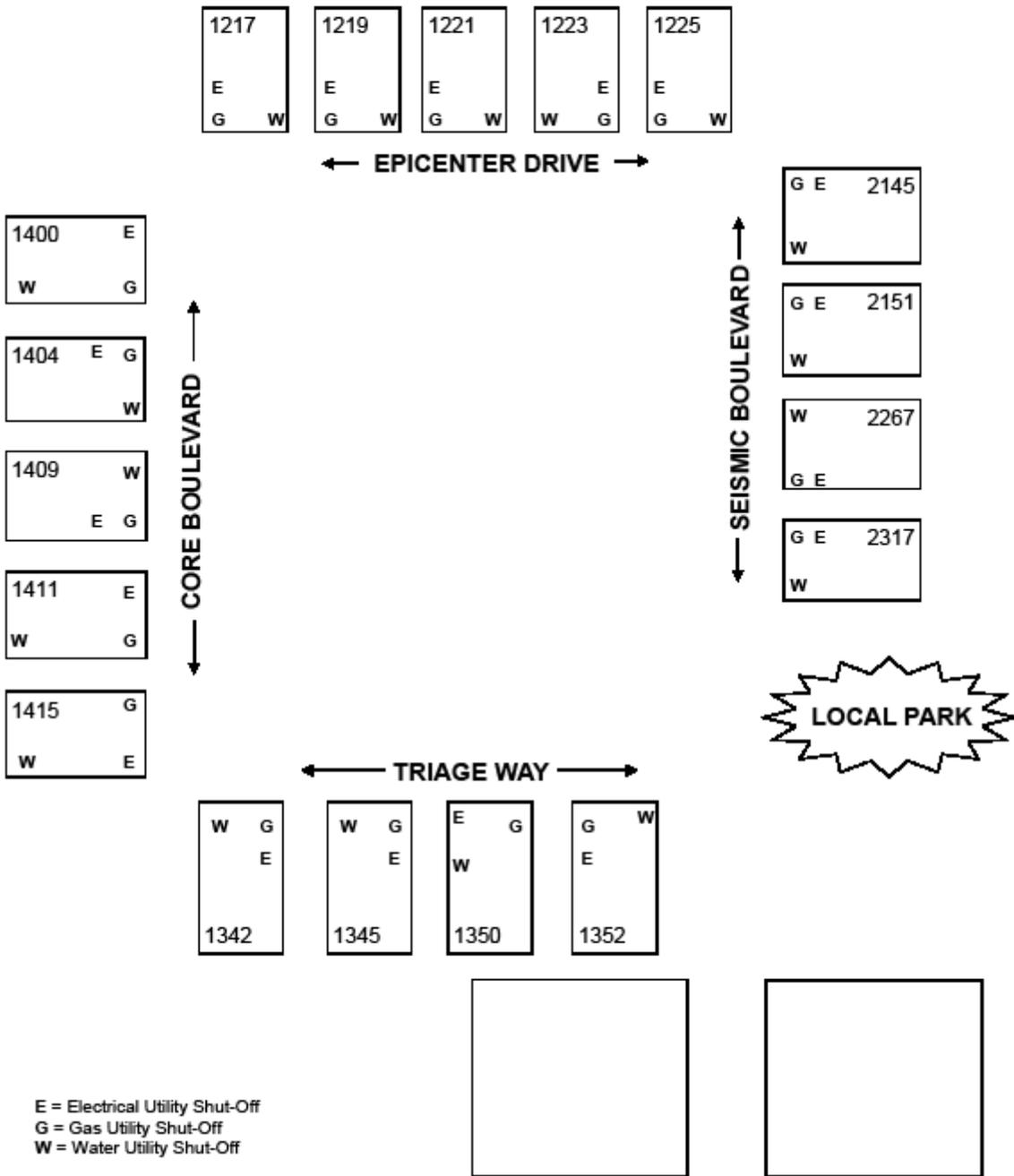
When the Command Team is in place around the table, the facilitator should read the exercise scenario. Warn the team once again that when the exercise begins it will be run to completion without stopping and that some of the inputs may be incomplete or confusing. When the Command Team is ready to go, the facilitator should set the exercise clock to 0:00 and begin reading the sequence of events. It adds to the value of the training if the umpire uses a handheld radio to deliver these input events.

At the end of the one hour exercise, there needs to be a review to consider the actions the team and the Commander have taken. The facilitator should take notes during the exercise to assist this discussion. Everyone should take part. Remember that a training exercise is supposed to generate errors. If you don't make any errors when you train, the exercise was not difficult enough.

A TTE like this should take about two hours to complete; you may choose to have a longer or shorter exercise. A well prepared neighborhood should conduct several TTE's per year in preparation for the April city-wide field exercise.

CORE Exercise Neighborhood Utilities Map

(OFD Training Division)



IC _____ CORE Exercise Status Board Date: _____ Time ____/____

ADDRESS <small>LOCATION OF INCIDENT</small>	TIME <small>REPORTED</small>	SITUATION <small>DETAILS</small>	PRIORITY <small>1-2-3-X</small>	ACTION <small>TO MITIGATE PROBLEM</small>
1342 Triage Way				
1345 Triage Way				
1350 Triage way				
1352 Triage Way				
1400 Core Blvd				
1404 Core Blvd				
1409 Core Blvd				
1411 Core Blvd				
1415 Core Blvd				
	<p>Priority: 1 = Immediate threat to human life/safety 2 = Delayed 3 = Minor X = Destroyed/Dead OK = No action needed</p> <p>Response Team Codes: DA = Damage Assessment HR = Hazard Reduction</p> <p>SR = Search & Rescue DFA = Disaster First Aid SSN = Sheltering & Special Needs</p>			

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1217 Epicenter Drive				
1219 Epicenter Drive				
1221 Epicenter Drive				
1223 Epicenter Drive				
1225 Epicenter Drive				
2145 Seismic Blvd				
2151 Seismic Blvd				
2267 Seismic Blvd				
2317 Seismic Blvd				
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The Neighborhood Incident Command Team:

Individual Missions

During a disaster, the number of persons on your Command Team should expand or contract as called for by the situation you face. The Commander is in command; disagreements about decisions made should be discussed after the exercise. The Commander may, of course, ask for advice from the command team, but this should be kept to a minimum and decisions are his or hers alone. A table top exercise is the ideal place to make mistakes – mistakes made here are learning experiences and are mistakes you will learn *not* to make if called upon to act for real.

For the purposes of this exercise, we will use a four person command team. The tasks of the individual team members are as follows:

It is the mission of the **Neighborhood Incident Commander** (NIC) to assume overall responsibility for neighborhood response during a serious emergency. This person will establish an awareness of the situation, determine if the Neighborhood Command Center should be activated, and direct others in response to specific problems. Decisions (what to do and when to do it) are made by the Commander alone. The Neighborhood Incident Commander will also be prepared to report to First Responders, when called up[on to do so, on the status of the neighborhood during the emergency.

It is the mission of the **Deputy Neighborhood Incident Commander** (DNIC) to act at the direction of the NIC. Normally this will include the set up and management of the Command Center, forming and training field teams. For the purposes of this exercise, the DNIC will keep track of the number of persons available to for field teams.

It is the mission of the **Communications Team Leader** to coordinate the flow of information into and out of the Neighborhood Command Center as directed by the Neighborhood Incident Commander. Normally, the Communications Team Leader operates the neighborhood radio net and directs the Scribe to record information on the Status Board. The commander relies on the Communications Team to manage the information needed to make effective emergency response decisions.

It is the mission of the **Scribe** to clearly display information on the Status Board for use by the Neighborhood Incident Commander. The Scribe uses information from a variety of sources to maintain an accurate, up to date and complete picture of the neighborhood's situation on the Status Board. The Scribe indicates incident priorities on the Status Board at the Commander's direction.

CORE Command Team TTE Scenario

This exercise makes a number of assumptions. When you conduct a TTE in your neighborhood, you (as the facilitator) should read the following scenario aloud at the beginning of the exercise, before the exercise clock is started.

“It is now 3:30 AM on a Thursday morning. There has been a strong earthquake. The ground shook hard for 45 seconds. Electric service goes on and off intermittently. There is a strong smell of gas in the air as well as the smell of smoke.

There is no response from 911 – assume that the First Responders are overwhelmed -- and your neighborhood is on its own.

20 minutes have passed since the earthquake. You are frightened and emotionally upset but uninjured. Your home has come through the event with only minor problems; furniture has fallen over, there are apparently superficial cracks in the drywall and a broken window. Your immediate family is OK. You have checked your utilities (also OK).

You have put on your personal protective gear (long pants, long sleeve shirt, stout shoes or boots) put on a plastic hard hat if you have one, grabbed your “go bag” and reported to the Neighborhood Command Center.

The command center has been set up with the command team (commander, deputy commander, communication team leader and scribe) in place. You have sufficient light to work with. Neighbors have begun to arrive at the command center to ask for help and offer to assist. You have a “sign in” table and an “I need help” table located some distance from the command team. These tables are overseen by the deputy commander.

Presently there are two CORE III trained persons in the “bull pen,” one person with CORE II training and six untrained persons waiting for direction. A disaster first aid station has not been set up.

Commander, what is your first action at this point?” (Send out DA teams? With these people on hand, who would you send?) (Set up DFA station? Who would you send?) When the command team is ready, the facilitator should start the time clock and read the following sequence of events.

CORE Command Team TTE

Sequence of Events

TIME	ACTIVITY
3.33 AM	Sit Rep #1: Spontaneous Volunteer reports water pipe apparently broken under house at 2267 Seismic Blvd, water flowing from under the house.
3.37 AM	By radio: DA1 reports gas leak at meter and adolescent alone and frightened at 2151 Seismic Blvd. DA1 requests instructions.
3.40 AM	By radio: DA2 reports broken water main at 1345 Triage Way, water flooding the street.
3.43 AM	Sit Rep #2: SV reports hysterical parent or caregiver with infant at 1217 Epicenter Drive. This person apparently speaks only Spanish.
3.45 AM	Umpire to DC: In addition to persons indicated above, you have 1 more CORE III trained person, 3 CORE II trained person and 8 additional untrained volunteers.
3.48 AM	By radio: DA2 reports fire in garage at 1342 Triage Way.
3.52 AM	By radio: DA1 reports gas leak at 1225 Epicenter Drive, valve stuck and resident won't leave. Pet trapped inside house. DA1 requests instructions. Sit Rep #3: SV reports chimney toppled at 1400 Core Blvd.
3.56 AM	By radio: DA1 reports pole down at 1221 Epicenter Drive, wires blocking the road.
4.00 AM	By radio: DA1 reports completing its route and requests directions.
4.07 AM	Umpire to Commander: Commander, report on the location of your field teams and the persons on each team.
4.09 AM	Sit Rep #4: SV reports a pack of dogs in the vicinity of 1409 Core Blvd. Dogs appear to be not aggressive.
4.12 AM	Sit Rep #5: SV reports house at 1404 Core Blvd appears to be off its foundation.
4.18 AM	Sit Rep #6: SV reports person unconscious but breathing on porch at 1352 Triage Way.
4.26 AM	Sit Rep #7: SV reports collapsed porch at 1415 Core Blvd.
4.30 AM	Exercise ends.